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Memories of the National Road*

By HARRIET MCINTYRE FOSTER, Indianapolis

The trails of the world have been made by primitive man and wild beasts since primeval days. They have left their foot prints on the mountain tops, in jungles, on the prairies and in forests. In our Western world the Indians and the wild beasts found the direct trail to lake, river, pasture and hunting ground. "The Path of Nemacolin" was a famous Indian trail that was "blazed" by Nemacolin the great Delaware chief through the forest from Wills Creek (later called Cumberland) to the Ohio River. This trail was used by General Washington in 1754 and later was followed by General Braddock and his army and, in consequence, was called Braddock's Road. Many years afterwards this path of Nemacolin was included in the old Cumberland Road or National Road as we now know it.

The cow paths of the village of Boston became the streets of that now famous city. Our ancestors found many well defined trails, followed them through the forests, until they became well trodden paths. Our country is now crossed and re-crossed by countless roads. In this great labyrinth of highways there is one that is of great historic interest—the old Cumberland Road as it is named in all the government documents or the National Road as we call it.

This thoroughfare so full of life and business, was once Indiana's only commercial artery. Her pioneer citizens once deemed it a matter of great importance to be located upon this highway. The National Road is the only one ever planned and constructed by the United States government.

It was not until 1806 when Jefferson was President that the idea of a National Road originated. It is commonly said that Henry Clay proposed the idea. It was, however, really

* Read at the dedication of the Marker at the crossing of the National and Michigan Roads in Indianapolis.

suggested by the great financier, Mr. Albert Gallatin, secretary of the treasury. The construction of the National road began at Cumberland, Maryland and it was called the Cumberland Road but, as it was built by the government of the United States, the people persisted in naming it the National Road. If not the originator Henry Clay was certainly the great champion of the road in Congress. In his life it is related that he had "to beg, entreat and supplicate Congress" to make the appropriations necessary for the completion of the road. He also said in one of his speeches to Congress—"I have myself toiled to prevail upon you to make the necessary appropriations." He passionately devoted his great eloquence to securing favorable legislation from Congress.

Commencing under Mr. Jefferson its construction was sanctioned and prosecuted by every President and every Congress for more than twenty-five years. It passed through Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana and into Illinois. Finally each of these States accepted the responsibility of keeping up the road within its bounds. From the time the road was begun in 1806 until 1818, when it was opened, and until 1852, the date of the coming of the railroad west of the mountains, the National Road was the one great highway over which passed the trade, travel and mails between the East and the West.

Its many stately stone bridges, its iron mile posts and iron toll gates some of them still remaining are enduring monuments of its grandeur and stability. Many of the most illustrious statesmen and heroes of that period passed over the National Road on their way to and from Congress, and the capital—Jackson, Harrison, Clay, Sam Houston, Polk, Taylor, Shelby, Butler, Davy Crocket and many others. The long line of stage coaches that succeeded the wagons that were first used to carry passengers, then the private coaches and finally the "prairie schooner," made an almost continuous procession of vehicles and horsemen. Many really excellent taverns came into existence. For some years the ruins of one of these taverns stood on the western limit of Irvington.

The traveler on this road passed through a great variety of scenery diversified by mountain views, grand and historic

rivers, flourishing towns and villages and interesting homes of distinguished people. A few miles east of Wheeling, on the National Road, is a very beautiful stone bridge over Wheeling Creek. Near this bridge stands a time-stained monument erected in 1820 in honor of Henry Clay by Col. Moses Shepherd, the son of my Revolutionary ancestor, Col. David Shepherd. The inscription upon this monument bears testimony to the grateful appreciation of Henry Clay's great efforts for the National Road.

The monument is surmounted by the statue of liberty. Near by on a picturesque eminence stands the historic Shepherd mansion now known as the Monument House, a stone building erected in 1798 near the place where old Fort Shepherd stood, built by my great-great-grandfather, Col. David Shepherd, the hero of the defense of Fort Henry at Wheeling. In the old cemetery surrounding the Old Stone Church is another handsome monument bearing the following inscription in memory of Col. Moses Shepherd, son of Col. David Shepherd:

To him the country owes a large debt of gratitude as well for his defense of it when a frontier settlement as for his recent public services in aiding the extension and construction of the Cumberland Road through Virginia.

Mrs. Jessie Benton Fremont gives an interesting account of her visit to the Monument House and delights of bowling along this fine road over the Blue mountains in early spring in a large reserved coach and four, and of the great inns where they stopped at night. But this road led mainly among stern pine forests and upland wastes of stony lands. Mrs. Fremont wrote that this fine road and the public men connected with it made great reputations and also great fortunes. One of these men was my great uncle, Colonel Shepherd and he and his wife used to drive to Washington in their coach and four every winter, in order to make to Congress his reports of the progress of the building of the National Road.

It was opened to Columbus, Ohio, in 1827 and to Indianapolis in 1830. The length through Indiana beginning in Wayne county and ending in Vigo county is 149 $\frac{1}{4}$ miles, and the cost through this State was \$513,099, paid by the United

States government. The work began at Indianapolis and extended east and west. From 1827 to 1847 the National Road was Indiana's chief commercial highway. It ended in Terre Haute. With the coming of the railroad in 1847 before the National Road was completed beyond the western boundary of Indiana, the railroad had become the chief agency of travel and commerce, and our grand old National Road was practically lost in the prairies of Illinois.

My personal interest in the National Road is very great, as for nearly thirty years my life was passed beside it. I was born in my grandfather's house on the National Road near Columbus, Ohio. A few years later my father, Reverend Dr. Thomas McIntire, with his wife and three children, drove in a carriage from Columbus, Ohio, to Indianapolis, over this road. One trunk was carried on the trunk rack behind. The remainder of the baggage was sent to Cincinnati, then down the Ohio river to Madison, thence to Indianapolis by way of the old Madison railroad, then the only railway in the State. Several of the trunks did not arrive for six weeks. We then came to our new home, the Deaf and Dumb Institution, on this road. At that date the National Road passed through the grounds of this institution which extended on the north to Michigan street and to one-half a mile south of the Michigan Road. On the north side and by the road was a fine orchard, garden and gardener's house. A small stream ran through the garden. On the south side of the road stood the institution with school buildings and shops, all surrounded by beautiful grounds laid out in the formal English style with fountains and green-houses, with drives and walks interspersed with every variety of evergreen and shrubbery. It was a perfect copy in every detail of an English formal garden and for twenty-seven years my father had charge of this school. Here I was married and lived in a cottage on the National Road where two of our children were born. During these years almost every distinguished person that came to Indianapolis, including all the governors of Indiana, frequently passed over this road to visit the school for the deaf. Rutherford B. Hayes, afterward President, was a guest in the institution for a day and night when he came to meet and escort Mr. Lincoln to Ohio on his first and fateful journey

to Washington City. President Benjamin Harrison was a frequent guest as well as friend and counselor of my father. One of Queen Victoria's maids of honor, Miss Murray, while a visitor in this country, was a deeply interested tourist of the West and was entertained by my parents. An entertainment in the institution was always given to the members of the legislature during the sessions and a dinner for the special committee in charge of the benevolent institution. Once much to the delight and entertainment of the children, General Tom Thumb drove out on the National Road to the institution in his gilded coach and four ponies and took one of my little sisters a drive in his coach.

Memory also recalls the environment of this spot as it was in those long ago days. Across the Michigan Road was a small and beautiful woods, Bates' Woods, where as children we went for the first violets and spring beauties. Just beyond was the home of Mrs. Lawrence Vance. Across the road on the north, by historic Pagues Run, was Bates' mill, across from this spot was the farm of Governor Noble, then dead, but his son Winston Noble lived on the northern part of it and his sister, Mrs. Davidson, lived on the eastern part. On the National Road further east Dr. William Latham resided, also Col. John Ray and beyond the institution Dr. Nofsinger lived, now the residence of Mr. Wm. M. Taylor. On the Michigan Road lived Dr. Bobbs, beyond lived the Misses Canby, relatives of General Canby and relatives of the late Gen. Hawkins; Mr. J. K. Sherpe, Senior, lived at the corner of what is now State street and Michigan Road and beyond was the birthplace of William Chase, the famous artist. This picturesque point is unchanged for thirty years, and is occupied by Miss Heim, the daughter of Mr. Heim, who built the house. These are a few of the homes that memory recalls on this eventful occasion.

During these early years there was a great exodus of people from the East to the West who were constantly passing over the National Road to the far West. It was a constant source of interest for all the children to stand by the entrance gate and watch the almost endless stream of "Movers" in their canvas covered wagons, "prairie schooners" as they were called, followed by droves of weary cattle. It was a

passing scene of great interest and often of tragedy. Once the leader of a party died by the way. He was brought into the institution and Father Bessonies was sent for. He was a great friend of my father and they were co-laborers in charity work. That night a wake was held in one of the shops and the next morning the man was taken to St. Johns and then buried. Another time a poor little baby was very ill. My mother brought the mother and child into the house but it was too late, the baby died and my father held a funeral service in the chapel and the baby was buried in Green Lawn. In my childhood the National Road was a shifting and endless panorama of the human comedy.

The placing of this milestone not only marks the crossing of two important roads, the National Road and the Michigan but also marks the beginning of the construction of the National Road in Indiana as, contrary to the usual procedure, the building of the road was begun in Indianapolis and worked east and west. With the coming of the railroads began the decline of our famous old highway. In many places it was greatly neglected and in some counties it resembled a country lane. After years of neglect and almost abandonment, the magical influence of the motor cycle and the automobile has instilled new life into the old road. Once more it is restored to its old fame as the first and only government road.

The great awakening of interest in good wagon roads has caused the construction of the Dixie Highway which crosses the National Road in Indianapolis and extends from the limits of the north and south; and also of the Lincoln Highway which extends from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans, passing through the northern part of our State.

Allusions have been made to the trails of the vanishing Indian days. The word is no longer limited to the blazed paths of the Indian. It has become a common appellation much in use by cycle riders and automobile tourists.

The great adventurers of these days are the automobile tourist and the motorcyclist. For them the new trail has evolved with its bands of red, blue, yellow, white or black, with various designs of black arrows or red and blue balls or diamonds.

These painted signs mark the highways from city to city,

from State to State, from region to region. Many of the older trails are being restored such as the old Natchez Trace, Boone's Route through this State to the French settlements on the Great Lakes, the Sante Fe Trail and many others of the Indians and the original white explorers.

So once more our grand old pioneer National Road is coming into its own and is being restored to its former greatness as the first highway from the East to the West.